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ABSTRACT

The Suburban Library System of Hinsdale, Illinois developed a program for selecting, ordering, cataloging, processing, and circulating 6,279 cassettes in 1972. This program was implemented to make available to the public a large rotating collection of cassette recordings of both music and the spoken word. The member libraries decided jointly on the collection content in order to avoid duplication and to create an indepth collection for the total library system. Instead of being centrally housed, the cassettes were distributed, on a rotating basis, to eight libraries in the system. (KC)

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establishing a cassette program for a public library

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On October 15, 1972 the Suburban Library System in Hinsdale, Illinois began a cassette program that ranks in the catagory of a prototype. The collection of 6,279 cassette includes spoken word and music and was placed in eight libraries in the system. What everyone wants to know is how we did it! How did we purchase the items? What selection tools and suppliers did we work with? How did we process the cassettes? What circulation policies did we establish? And most important — how is the public reacting to the service?

Background

It seems like quite a large order to answer all those questions, but then the whole project was of a magnitude that boggles the mind. How did we get started on such an innovative and ambitious project? As in most cases it was a combination of an idea whose time had come coupled with money being available to test the idea. The Suburban Library System received an Enrichment Grant from the state of Illinois early in 1972. After polling the membership to determine priorities for system services SLS decided to use the grant for innovative media. The grant contained stipulations which at times proved exasperating: (1) the money had to be spent by June 30, 1972 and (2) only adult materials and no duplicates could be purchased. Thus, within five months after I was hired, purchasing for all materials for two services — framed art prints and tape cassettes — had to be completed. The framed print program was established and on display in system libraries by June 1972 and the cassette program opened officially in October 1972.

Zone Services

The system membership decided to experiment with a new circulation concept, Zone Services. The suburban area comprising SLS is a very compact one; one suburb is contiguous to another. Because there is no great distance involved, many patrons use SLS cards frequently at neighboring suburban libraries. The reciprocal borrowing statistics show these common traffic patterns. Using these patterns the 58 libraries in the system were divided into eight zone clusters. Each zone includes seven or eight libraries with varying population counts. One library in each zone is the center for framed prints, another library in each zone houses the tape cassettes, and eventually a third library will house an experimental service that is unique to that zone. The ultimate plan being that each library in the zone will be able to offer some type of specialized collection. The rationale for this method of operation is based on several facts of modern life: (1) the library no longer has to be within easy walking distance for everyone in the community because the automobile makes the facilities of many libraries within easy reach of patrons and (2) with the

high cost of new materials, the great proliferation of new media introduced every day, and local resources being tightened, local libraries can no longer realistically attempt to provide all services in depth for their patrons. Zone Services is a reasonable answer in this situation because many services are still available to the public but within a short driving distance. What has often happened in the past with new services is that each individual library will purchase titles or art prints or cassettes that comprise a "basic" collection. So as a patron travels from suburb to suburb he sees the same "basics" but no in depth collections. With Zone Services, the system is able to create a varied, in depth collection in one library in each zone by spending about the same amount of money as all the individual libraries in that zone would have spent to simply duplicate each other's collections.

The prospect of central housing and booking at SLS headquarters was also explored because some systems presently circulate framed art prints and cassettes in this manner. However, after exploring the cost of setting up such a central service, it was decided the zone concept was less costly and had the advantage of placing the materials directly before the patron which generally increases use of the material.

Selection and Ordering

On the basis of desire to house the collection and provide the staff, as well as hours open and space available — eight libraries were selected to house the cassettes.

Meetings were held with the member libraries in each of the eight zones to acquaint libraries in a particular zone with each other and to gather input as to procedures and collection content. The eight zone center libraries also met separately. Information from these discussions was evaluated in relation to two factors: the types of material available in the cassette format and what was available for purchase within the established time limit. The following categories were finally determined:

A. Music
   1. Popular
   2. Classical
   3. Show tunes, humor, and nostalgia
   4. Religious, international, and miscellaneous — sound effects, etc.

B. Spoken Word
   1. The Arts: Literature, Music, Theatre, Film, Dance, and Art
   2. Travel
   3. Languages
   4. Business
   5. Career Information
   6. Self-development
   7. Issues and Insights (current events)

In all, 39 suppliers provided the 6,279 tapes in the entire collection. Each zone center houses approximately 775 tapes. Although each collection includes the same categories, the contents of each collection are entirely different from the other seven collections. Only in the areas of languages and typing/shorthand were duplicates purchased. This was done on the recommendation of the membership so that each zone center would have a supply of these very popular items. SLS paid for all the duplicates from its own budget. Approximately two-thirds of the collection is spoken word and one-third is music.

We can relate many experiences with manufacturers and distributors, but let us suffice with just a few. There is a wide variety in the quality of *tape*, in the durability of the plastic cassette *case*, and in the level of *material* recorded on the tape (all of the SLS tapes were purchased prerecorded). My first suggestion is to order items with preview privileges — expecially when the company name is an unfamiliar one. For example, RCA displays high levels of recording skill, but many small operations are jumping on the cassette bandwagon and oftentimes the tapes reflect this inexperience. Another suggestion — some music tapes are manufactured by means of a Dolbyized technique which means that the natural hiss noise of the tape is reduced and what results is a wonderfully clear recording. Classical recordings were the first to use the Dolby process. Better cassette players now have a built-in Dolby mechanism which makes even regular tapes sound clearer. A Dolbyized tape does not have to be played on Dolbyized player, but as you can imagine, the combination of a Dolbyized tape and player is high class listening. The moral: look for the word Dolby on the cassette; when you have a choice of two recordings choose the Dolbyized one.

For selection tools and ordering information I would recommend the following as basics: *Schwann Record and Tape Guide*, published monthly, for sale at all record stores for $.85. Schwann concentrates on music, however it does offer some spoken word recordings. *Harrison Tape Catalogue* is published every two months, sells for $.75 at most record stores and is quite similar to Schwann in that it concentrates on music. Harrison only lists reel to reel tapes, cassettes, and 8 track tapes; Schwann lists records as well as tapes. For spoken word tapes consult *Directory of Spoken-Voice Audio Cassettes* which lists a

good selection of distributors, a wide variety of subject matter and includes annotations. To obtain a copy, write: Cassette Information Services, Box 17727, Fay Station, Los Angeles, California 90057 ($5.00). *Listening Post* is a good source for *reviews* of current music and spoken word items. A yearly subscription (10 issues) is $9.00. Write Listening Post, 15255 East Don Julian Road, City of Industry, California 91749.

Processing

In processing the cassettes, the main goal was simplicity. All processing was done at the system headquarters with the aid of summer help. As the tapes arrived they were checked against invoices, listened to for brief periods on each side to enable us to catch defects immediately, assigned accession numbers, given a code letter to designate the category of the content, for example C for classical (these letters were primarily for use later in compiling the catalog), and given one of eight arbitrary letters to correspond to the eight zone centers. The end product of the identification information looked like this: TC-S71-C15 L. TC stands for tape cassette. S71 means this is a system tape purchased in the 71-72 fiscal year. C refers to classical music and fifteen is simply the accession number. The letter L tells in which of the eight collections the tape belongs. We chose letters to identify the collections rather than the zone center's name because we wanted to be able to rotate the collections in the future and thus avoid labeling the collections as to a specific library. So, for example, all tapes in the collection at Hinsdale Library are labeled L. Those at Elmwood Park are P. After the rotation, La Grange may house Collection L.

A shelflist card was then typed to include the following information: title, artist, arrival date, supplier's name, cost, and the above identification numbers and letters. The artist is the main entry for popular recordings; the title is the main entry for shows, films and musicals; and the composer is the main entry for classical recordings, followed by the title of the work and the performer. These cards were used as our controls during the hectic weeks of processing. We worked with the cards rather than the actual cassettes whenever we needed information. The cards were filed in accession number order, later they were put in order by zones and divided by content within the zone so that the information for the tape catalog could be typed directly from the cards.

The next concern was how to package the cassettes for ease of circulation and yet eliminate the problem of pilferage which so many of the libraries were concerned about. The method chosen has proven quite workable. Each cassette is placed in a heavy duty 6" x 9" manila envelope which has a tie on the back rather than a metal clip because the clip breaks too easily. A pocket is glued to the front of the envelope and a book card inserted. The pocket and book card display the following information: accession number, collection letter, title and artist. All this information is necessary on *both* the pocket and the book card because the book card is retained by the library as a circulation record. Thus, if the information is not on the pocket as well, and the patron checks out several tapes, he is unable to tell which package contains which tape. The book card also contains the list price of the cassette, so the librarian can immediately tell the patron the replacement fee if the item has been lost. The accession number and collection letter are also written on the front side of the manila envelope.

Another processing question arose: How to write the collection letter and accession number on both the plastic cassette case and on the paper covering on the outside case? After trial and error we finally discovered the Sharpie pen by Sanford ($.29). It's one of those miracles of our age that's designed to write clearly on anything and won't smudge.

Multiple Tape Sets

Another decision to be made was how to package sets with multiple tapes and single copies of booklets. In the case of a set with a large number of tapes and only one booklet we ordered extra copies of the booklet and included one with each package of two, three, or four tapes. We tried not to include more than four tapes to any one package to allow the individual parts on the set to circulate to as many people as possible at any one time. We stamped all booklets "Do not write on this material" with the hope that the booklets would be acceptable for numerous circulations before they have to be replaced.

Catalog

In each zone center, the cassettes in their manila envelopes are stored behind the circulation desk. The patron browses through a printed catalog that is color coded for each zone and organized by subject; for example, popular and classical music with items listed by accession number and title under the subject:

Popular Music *Collection 0*

Acc. #	*Artist Composer*	*Title*
378[illegible]	The Mothers	Just Another Band from L.A.
3788	Pink Floyd	Obscured by Clouds

Large quantities of catalogs were printed so patrons may take a copy home. The front page of the catalog lists the procedures to be followed when borrowing cassettes. The patron selects the numbers he wants from the catalog and gives the list to a library staff member who retrieves the cassettes.

Circulation Procedures

The tapes are circulated for two weeks at a time and may be renewed for another two weeks. Reserves are available. Each zone center has its own overdue policy. Patrons are asked to limit themselves to a reasonable number of cassettes.

Each zone center also circulates ten cassette players and adapters with a canvas carrying bag. The players and adapters may be reserved.

Damage

Because it is so difficult to prove who caused damage and because cassettes are a new format for many people and thus will probably be damaged often at the beginning of the service, it was decided that borrowers will not be held responsible for damaged cassettes, however they are responsible for lost cassettes. Our experience thus far reveals a minimal amount of both damage and loss considering the size of the collection (6,279). We estimate that in these first few months of the service 35 cassettes a month are returned to us damaged, while five are lost. Those of us dealing with the service are most amazed at the small amount of loss, but we feel this is attributable almost in full to the packaging and circulation procedures being used.

Duplication

Considering the staff time and equipment it would take to repair damaged cassettes with the end result that the cassette is still weak in one spot and will probably break again soon, we decided it would be less expensive in the long run to buy a new cassette. Although SLS replaces damaged cassettes with new ones, many libraries and schools have chosen to make duplicates of their original tapes and circulate the duplicates. When damage does occur, they simply dispose of the damaged cassette and duplicate the original. However, there are several factors to consider in such an arrangement: (1) duplicators are expensive — $1500-2000 and up, (2) generally a clerk or skilled technician is needed to run the duplicator (depending on the complexity of the machinery) and someone has to type labels to affix to the new copies, (3) blank tape and labels need to be purchased, (4) occasionally the duplicator needs costly repair, and last but certainly not least, (5) the whole operation can be interpreted as a violation of the copyright laws unless specific permission for copying has been given (and few manufacturers will do this). In fact, the SLS Board decided that we could not duplicate any tape unless we acquired express permission from the manufacturer either in writing or from a printed statement on the cassette itself.

Circulation Statistics

And now for the most important question of all — how is the public reacting to the tape cassette service? The response can be expressed in one word: fantastic! In the first full month of service 4,056 cassettes from a collection of 6,729 circulated. One library circulated 100 the first day. Every month since (the service has been in effect for 6½ months) the circulation has been hovering around 3,500-4,000. The public is surprised at finding cassettes in the library, astounded by the variety of the collection and amazed that cassette players and adapters can also be checked out free. Most people expect to find lots of music and little else, but when they discover cassettes on "How to be a Better Salesman" and "Tax Advantages" they are elated. One sales manager has his men check out cassettes and listen to them during their many hours on the road. Another lady gave her daughter some literature tapes read by Basil Rathbone to take to her elementary school literature class. One patron admits to giving up television viewing since the tape cassette service started — she finds the variety of tapes more interesting!

A side development in connection with the cassette and framed print services is the success of the Zone Services concept. Circulation for these two new services to people *other than* the *local* patrons of the zone center library has increased steadily since the service began. During the first month of the cassette service, 42 percent of the circulation was to patrons other than the local patrons of the zone center library. That figure has now increased to 62 percent of circulation. This zone circulation figure represents both

those items requested at the local level then delivered to local libraries via the SLS van drivers and those circulations in which the patron physically travels to another library to pick up the materials. So it appears that not only is the cassette service being enthusiastically received by library patrons, but also the patrons are responding quite readily to the zone center concept of housing and circulating materials — an interesting development on which to base future library development plans.

Promotion

Promotion for the tape cassette service was approached from several angles. First a colorful poster announcing that cassettes were coming to the library was distributed to all the libraries in the system a few months prior to the actual availability of the cassettes. This created an interest and built up demand by the time the cassettes actually arrived on the scene. Next the tape cassette catalog for each zone was printed. It includes a cover sheet explaining the borrowing policies for the service and individual sheets with lists of tapes on various subject areas. The lists are arranged by accession number under the subject headings. Enough catalogs were printed so that patrons may take them home for browsing at their leisure. This allows the patron to become more familiar with the collection and to pass the booklet on to other friends with whom he discusses this new library service. A news release stressing the variety of the collection and the fact that both cassettes and cassette players are now available in libraries was sent to all libraries in the system to be distributed to local papers. Some papers sent reporters to take pictures of people checking cassettes out of the library. One patron became interested in the service, and wrote a feature article on the framed art print and cassette programs and the new concept of Zone Services for his newspaper. I have spoken to community groups using a traveling display of the new types of media available through their library. Our best publicity however is the surprised and pleased patron who tells his neighbors about what's new at the library!

Rotation

The original plan of action called for eight collections to be rotated from one zone center to another once a year. Thus each zone center will have an entirely new collection for its public to choose from each year and the present group of tapes will not reach exposure saturation for eight years. Hopefully, the rotation of tapes will keep interest alive in the cassette collections.

Evaluation

There are still lots of decisions to make. Should the packaged tapes be put on open shelves rather than have the librarian do all the retrieving or will this lead to wholesale pilfering? What are the least and most popular titles? Should we buy duplicates of popular items or continue to buy single copies of new materials? Should the collections include materials for children? Do we want to purchase more cassette players or use this money for materials and expect patrons to begin buying their own players?

Even though we have had considerable experience in establishing a cassette collection there are still many questions about how to provide the most effective service, but we do feel we have taken a giant step in the right direction based on the public's response to the program thus far. Innovative media is an exciting and challenging area in which to work because it is new and developing and expanding in so many different directions.